

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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KESTELL OF GREYSTONE.

A SERIAL STORY.

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"*A Faire Danzell*," etc., etc.

CHAPTER II. DINNER AND A CRITIC.

COURT GARDEN was in its way a perfect country house, and the Squire was loved and respected by all his tenants; but to the world in general he was known as the husband of Mrs. Eagle Bennison. This was his title of honour, and he was proud to accept it. He always showed the same imperturbable front to the world; whilst his wife was, on the whole, like a highly-cut diamond, many-sided. She had her sprightly mood, her sad mood, her religious mood, her worldly, her playful, her would-be childlike, and her pathetic mood. No one had yet ever found out which of these many moods was most natural to her, and if any one ventured to decide this knotty point, he soon avowed himself wrong.

Mrs. Eagle Bennison's dinner-parties were always pleasant; for, in spite of her own personality being never forgotten, the Squire's wife was not unwilling that others, when in her house, should shine; and as she had a kind of childlike simplicity, in spite of her great artificiality, she somehow made opposite elements fuse together from sheer surprise at her audacity.

To describe her would need time; for how can pen do justice to the various lights and shades that flitted over the pretty face of Mrs. Eagle Bennison? Her age could not be guessed, for trouble had never made wrinkles; her bright eyes were never hidden by pince-nez or

spectacles, though she was known to be shortsighted; her teeth—were they hers except by purchase?—looked like pearly treasures, and were so often exhibited when she smiled, that at last one learnt to expect the vision just as regularly as, but more frequently than, the cuckoo of a Swiss clock. She had no grey hairs, though what aid to everlasting colour she used was not revealed; and as for the rest of her appearance, she was not tall, but rather short and neat; her hands were plump and white, and profusely ornamented with jewels which had descended from the Eagles, the Bennisons, and the Eagle Bennisons. These precious stones were unfailing subjects of conversation; for girls were of course delighted to hear that this diamond ring had once belonged to Lady Eagle when her husband was Governor of Bengal, and that the present Mrs. Eagle Bennison had inherited it through dear Sir Joseph Eagle, with whom she had been a prime favourite.

But enough of the hostess, for dinner is going on, and the Squire's mutton is being eaten and praised, and Elva Kestell is listening to her neighbours' remarks with a smile, a really natural smile, on her lips. Mrs. Eagle Bennison's cousin, George Guthrie, was so often at Court Garden that he was almost one of the household; and Elva was glad she had been taken in by him this evening, for she was in no mood to be pleasant, and George was glad of a listener, and he was always good company. There was a twinkle in his eyes, though seldom a smile on his lips, when he spoke. He was a confirmed bachelor, and having known Elva from childhood, they were on those intimate terms which are as

delightful as they are rare. They called each other by their christian-names, and ideas of matrimony never crossed their minds.

Elva and her father having arrived a little late, she had not much noticed the other guests, till, now that she had time to look round, she saw a stranger, with a clever, refined face, talking to a young lady with straw-coloured complexion, and hair, eyelashes, and dress of the same shade. The others Elva knew well; there was the Honourable Walter Akister and his sister Betta. Lord Cartmel, their father, was dreamily listening to Mrs. Bennison; but Elva saw that he was really up in the moon.

George Guthrie saw Elva's glance, and said:

"Isn't my dear cousin radiant to-night? but it's all lost on his lordship. By the way, she told me it was Amice who was to be my lady, and that I was to make her talk about the world. What queer things we poor bachelors, who have no idea of marrying, are given to do. The other day a mamma said: 'Dear Mr. Guthrie, you are such a safe man, now do win my poor Georgie's confidence, and make her give up young Henry Parker. You know he has nothing a year, and must make up his mind to be a bachelor.'"

George Guthrie slightly imitated the voice of the fond parent, so that Elva could not help laughing.

"You were offended by the word bachelor; perhaps some day we shall have to congratulate a Mrs. Guthrie—but that would be funny!"

"Funny; why funny, pray? That is like the impertinence of the young. Let me give you a piece of advice, my dear Elva. A man of my age can offer advice gratis, and expect it to be received graciously, and my advice to you is, don't marry the first man who asks you; if you do, you are sure to repent."

"I hate all men this evening," said Elva, and the words of "The Current Reader" rose before her eyes. "They are so conceited, so prejudiced!"

"What makes you so indignant this evening? Not the first offer?"

"Oh no, no, only a snub. I want to do something worth doing in the world, and at every turn I am stopped, because I am only a woman."

"I charge thee fling away ambition! Why you are ambitious and rich. Good heavens, Elva, what terrible fate will overtake you?"

"Don't tease me. I am in earnest. I mean to begin life again."

"Humph! How does one manage that? But look round even this dinner table, and you will see how very well the world gets on without grand ideas and without brains. We will leave Lord Cartmel out of the question, he is all brains, but his son and daughter—on that point silence! Then my dear cousin, she has no brains; but she appreciates those who have. See how happy she is this evening because she has a new lion."

Elva looked up, and, curiously enough, met the eyes of the stranger, and the magic murmur of introduction not having been pronounced, she looked quickly down again without any look of recognition; but she felt amazed at the stranger's personal notice.

"I suppose you mean the man opposite—who is he?"

"A literary man. Some day I shall become one. I know the tricks of the trade. Put on in general company a slightly supercilious look, despise your neighbours without saying so in words, smile when they give their opinions about books, have abundant notes on scraps of paper put away somewhere for a future book, and never give a direct answer, and—well, then you are a full fledged literary man. It is easy enough."

"But you forget the book that is published," said Elva, thinking of the crushing review, and feeling very thankful George did not know about it.

"Not at all, that is by no means necessary; it does just as well if you review the works of other people."

"And crush them?"

"Or praise them, if written by a friend."

"Is that ever done?"

"I advise you to try. Only first make friends with the gentleman opposite; he is a reviewer."

"A reviewer! What is his name, or is it a secret?"

"A secret! I should imagine not, as I see his name often in 'The Current Reader.' Ah, you were not introduced because you came late, and my cousin knew you were to be posted up by me."

"What nonsense you are talking this evening," said Elva, determined not to ask the name of the lion.

There were six or seven men who reviewed novels in "The Current Reader," and this one had perhaps read the review which had pained her so much.

"Nonsense! You are not complimentary! If I were Lord George Guthrie, and you a young lady of ton and fashion, you would think me clever, and my talk fascinating. What is it Lear says? 'Through tattered clothes small vices do appear; robes and furr'd gowns hide all.'"

"I don't suppose reviewers are rich; they can't be, or they wouldn't be so spiteful," said Elva.

"Don't be sarcastic! Do you see that my cousin cannot hear all that the lion is saying, but she laughs just the same. I call that good manners."

"I call it being unreal."

"You have not seen much of society yet."

"I have had about six months of it; I waited for Amice, but now she is out she won't go anywhere. Mamma doesn't understand that it is really from shyness."

"I give you a year to reform. After that, Elva, you will not say what you think; you will not wish to do something which no one else does, and you will not stare so much at literary lions."

Yes, Elva was staring, for the straw-coloured lady had just made a remark.

"Mr. Fenner, do tell me the name of the last novel you reviewed."

"What did she call him?" said Elva, trying to speak naturally, though she felt the hot colour rush to her cheeks.

"Fenner, Hoel Fenner. Perhaps you have never noticed his name, but he is a rising man, only at Rushbrook we are so ignorant of our greatest men. In that way we represent the world."

"Hoel Fenner! Yes, I have seen his name. Why did he come here?"

"He was staying with the Heaton's at Saint John's Parsonage."

"Quite near to us," gasped Elva, for Saint John's was a church which nestled in a fir plantation at the foot of the Beacon, and which Mr. Eagle Bennison's father had built for the scattered hamlet known as Rushbrook Mills. Mr. Heaton and his sister were both dining here this evening, and had asked if they might bring Mr. Hoel Fenner with them.

George Guthrie found Elva so silent after this that he turned towards his other neighbour, Miss Heaton, and by the time the ladies left the room he had discussed all the poor of Rushbrook Mills, with whom the amusing bachelor was a great favourite.

When the last sweep of the last train had

rustled away, there was a general relaxation of the manly muscles; the Squire leant back in his chair, and George Guthrie bent forward. Walter Akister crossed his legs and turned sideways; the decanters solemnly went round in the fashion of a Parliamentary train, stopping with jerks at each station to discharge contents, and the whole manly company seemed to say, "Now we can be natural, there is no lady to make conversation for."

This was ungenerous conduct, for in the drawing-room the ladies were finding each other dull, their last sallies of wit being reserved till the men should appear.

George Guthrie, this evening, felt more drawn towards the stranger, Hoel Fenner. He knew all the Squire's thoughts, as translated in his meagre vocabulary, by heart. Walter Akister always froze up his geniality, for that young man was shy and not very good-tempered; besides, Mr. Guthrie, who was as clear-sighted as a woman, had discovered that young Walter spent a good deal of his time in looking at Elva Kestell, and he bore him a grudge for this. Lord Cartmel could not keep off sun, moon, and stars for long together, and George Guthrie had no turn for astronomy; but the stranger's face did interest him, so he changed his place and went and sat by him.

"You have no wine, Mr. Fenner; what shall I pass you?"

"Thank you, no more."

"A moderate drinker is the man most denounced just now," said George Guthrie, his face lighting up with his peculiar smile of quiet amusement; "one expects an inmate of Grub Street to be accompanied by a large bowl of punch and a soaked towel round his temples. I have just been telling Miss Kestell that if she ever treads the path of literature you are a man to be feared."

Hoel Fenner was intensely amused, and this look suited his face well. He was certainly handsome, without being an Adonis: tall, well-made; keen, deep-set hazel eyes; hair coming rather low down on his broad forehead, a moustache that did not hide a well-cut mouth, and a clean-shaven, strongly-marked chin and contour. His hands were specially noticeable in that they were delicately formed and yet strong in appearance—such hands as born surgeons possess.

"Miss Kestell. Was that the name of the lady on your right? It must have been something you said then which made her look at me so severely. Who is she? I

am a stranger here. I have known Mr. Heaton only a few months. We met last year at Zermatt, and he kindly asked me to come and see him in his lovely Vicarage."

"Every one about here knows Kestell père. There he sits, on the right; has general benevolence written on all his features, and, as far as I know, he deserves it. Has made heaps of money, 'oof,' our youngsters call it. I wish you literary men could find out the derivation of slang words. A slang Max Muller would benefit mankind. That's by the way. As for Kestell, he has got all the county business; knows everybody's affairs. He's getting old now, and has a cousin, Edward Hope, as partner; but he won't be equal to Kestell of Greystone. Through his wife, the latter is connected with some of our best families. Our county magnates enjoy a fame which you in London seldom get. He has only two daughters. The family lives a mile or so from here, in a house that was once a large mill, but is really, as Mrs. Eagle Bennison says, a 'gem,' now Rushbrook House. Elva Kestell, the one here this evening, is the elder. If the mother could take them out in London we should soon lose them, because money, you know, is better than beauty in these days. I don't admire Elva's face; but I've heard people say it is artistic. I don't know anything about art. The other, Amice, well, *entre nous* I never can be sure that she is quite sound in the upper storey—looks at you with great blue eyes that make one feel creepy. Now you know the family history."

"An epitome worthy of 'Lodge's Peerage,'" said Hoel. Then, looking across at Mr. Kestell, he added, "how comes it that he is such a rich man? One doesn't expect solicitors to be noted for riches."

"I've heard people make that remark before; but I suppose he has been lucky; owns some mines somewhere, and worked hard. When I look at Kestell I feel that he is a living reproach to me, because I was born lazy. I spend months here, because my cousin Eagle Bennison says I help him; but it's a matter on which we differ."

Hoel was really amused with this genial bachelor, whose face beamed with an expression of fun, or assumed one of the mock heroic. One could not be melancholy in his company; there were only a few who knew that under his stout, portly exterior beat a heart as soft as any woman's.

Here the Squire's voice was heard above the general din:

"Local option indeed! You can't trust townfolk at all; they cannot forget their own interests. Money getting is the curse of the age."

Mr. Kestell's answer was distinct:

"You are a little hard, Squire, on men who must make their fortune or leave their children beggars."

"Kestell's right," said George Guthrie.

"We who have fixed incomes are ready enough to throw stones at floating capital."

"Still it is true that our British conversation nearly always turns upon money," remarked Hoel. "Even our literature seems saturated with it. Ten novels out of twelve turn on somebody's fortune. Love is so mixed up with gold that we begin to doubt its separate existence."

"Here you speak in Elva's fashion. Miss Kestell has always visionary ideas about regenerating man and woman, and ends by——"

"By what?" said Hoel, who had been more interested in Elva's face than he had cared to show.

"By some very commonplace finale, which shows that mortals are quite incapable of carrying out their own theories. But I must introduce her to you."

"Miss Kestell has a well-formed head. I may be wrong, but I fancy that in London she would be run after."

"For her money," added George Guthrie. "No; I hope better things for my pupil; she and I have quarrelled ever since she was five years old."

When the gentlemen trooped into the drawing-room, looking somewhat sheepish and awkward, and eager to be lost in a crowd, yet quite unable to accomplish this feat, George Guthrie drew Mr. Fenner at once toward the corner where Elva was sitting.

"Elva, let me introduce Mr. Fenner to you. He believes in all the impossibilities of life, so I expect you will agree perfectly."

"On the contrary," said Hoel, taking a chair beside her, "I have a firm faith in the possible, not the impossible; but I do strongly object to making money the theme of every novel, newspaper article, and periodical peroration."

Hoel accompanied his words with a smile, which few women ever stood out against; but he noticed, being by nature a practised observant, that Miss Kestell's face remained cold.

"There may be many worse things than the wish to make money, I think. Some persons, who care nothing about riches, are quite as insolent as the purse-proud men who disgust one with their ostentation."

This was such a curious answer to receive from a young lady in a drawing-room, that Hoel took a yet closer scrutiny of the speaker. Yes, she was more than picturesque; the head was well posed; the grey eyes were capable of varied expression; the mobile mouth and clear complexion were all noticeable; but Elva's nose not being of any classical form, prevented her from becoming noted for beauty. However, apart from looks there was a certain passion of life in the girl, which Hoel quickly noted, and which he thought very uncommon in one so young. He took the trouble of putting her crude thought into a better setting.

"You mean that insolence, not money getting, is the sin of the age. It is a new idea, and I shall think it over."

Elva was a woman, and as such she was flattered.

"I meant something like that; but," more hotly, "I am afraid to talk to a critic. I—I see your reviews in 'The Current Reader.'"

"It's weary work reviewing novels," said Hoel, little guessing that he was heaping up the sum of his iniquity.

"I suppose it must be from the way you spoke of a novel this week."

"Which one was that?" said Hoel, smiling, in spite of himself, at this girl's energy and unconscious sarcasm.

"'An Undine of To-day.' When I read it, Mr. Fenner, I pitied that poor author. I should think you will stop all his future ideas."

"Oh yes, I remember. But, honestly, you would not have me praise such crude work? The lady—you said his, but it is certainly a lady—must have written out of the fulness of a very young heart. You forget the sacredness of art; it is no easy thing to write a novel. And what would happen if critics praised the first daub of a would-be artist—called it equal to a Raphael?"

Elva had made the effort of appearing natural, so that it never entered Hoel's mind he was speaking to the author of the novel in question. None the less was there war in Elva's heart.

"But clever critics see the promise of future good work, and say so; at least, that is my idea of a good critic."

She had thrown down the glove in good earnest; but again she saw Hoel's aggravating smile.

"Have you read 'Amiel's Journal'?" "Plus on a de puissance intellectuelle, plus il est dangereux de mal prendre et de mal commencer la vie," he says in it. Well, we critics are doing a kindness in preventing people from beginning badly their literary career. Honestly, if the diamond is still in its lump of blue clay, what pleasure does the world get from it? Unless the author can wash off the clay it is better to leave the diamond in its native bed."

"Wherever it is, the diamond is a diamond."

"I see you are bent on abusing critics, Miss Kestell. I must accept some blame for our tribe; but only partially. No one can write words that will have a moral value unless they have seen life under some of its most painful aspects. I don't mean the turbulent life of society scandals; but the personal life of conflict in the region of thought. A life of suffering, spiritual suffering, may transform people whom the world call prosperous. I fancy the author of the 'Undine' has never suffered, but has crude ideas of what she calls 'the soul.' By the way, what a useful word it is in the mouth of those who have hardly any understanding of the word, and but a slight belief in the reality."

Elva was going to answer vehemently; but at this moment Mrs. Eagle Bennison tripped towards them, showing a dissolving view of her pearly teeth.

"Mr. Fenner, are you giving some of your wisdom to dear Elva? If so, I don't like asking you to spare her; but I do want her to come and sing to us. You and Amice have such charming voices. My dear, how well your father looks this evening. Such a noble head, isn't it, Mr. Fenner? Come and sing 'Dreams,' Elva."

"Not to-night. I couldn't sing," said Elva, decidedly. "Miss Akister will do it much better than I can."

"Then do open the piano for her, Mr. Fenner," added Mrs. Bennison, when Miss Akister had consented, for she decided that Elva must not monopolise the lion.

Elva remained alone, but her thoughts were busy.

"He talks beautifully; but—no, I am sure he has not suffered. I can see that in his calm, handsome face. He thinks a great deal of himself and fancies he is always right."

"Aren't you going to say anything to

me?" said a voice close behind her. It was Walter Akister.

Betta, his sister, was so shy and awkward that she seldom mixed in the society of Rushbrook, having to keep all her energies for the scientific friends of her father; but Walter, who had the misfortune to be both unpolished and queer-tempered, often strolled down to the valley and spent a good deal of time on the lawn of Rushbrook House in the summer, and on the pools during skating time. Only George Guthrie had noticed the seeds of his admiration for Elva. Certainly she was unaware of it, and would have laughed the idea to scorn. Walter had none of the glamour in which a son of a nobleman is supposed to be usually enveloped; and as for the word lover, it was almost impossible for a girl, with any romantic tendencies, to associate it with Walter Akister; but, unfortunately, he constantly looked upon himself in this light, without having the least power of showing it. Even now, though he thought Elva looking beautiful, his tone was one of rough fellowship more than one mixed with any tender feeling.

"I can't speak across a room," said Elva, not taking the trouble even to smile.

Walter was easily repulsed, or, rather, he imagined sarcasm where none was intended. Elva had no idea of repulsing him any more than if a boy of twelve had addressed her. She did not understand his passionate nature.

"I'm going to London to-morrow, can I do anything for you? What's that fellow been saying to you?"

"Mr. Hoel Fenner is a literary man."

Elva did not quite like Walter Akister's tone.

"They're all such conceited stuck-up people."

"Please don't talk, there's your sister beginning to sing."

Walter moved away with a frown on his face. He was angry with Elva and angry with himself, and yet he could not accuse her of anything unusual. Amice always listened to him patiently, but Elva never pretended to encourage his visits.

The party broke up early, Mr. Kestell being the first to make a move, as he could bring forward a delicate wife as an excuse. In the hall Elva found Mr. Fenner standing close by her to help her with her wraps, whilst the Vicar was enveloping his sister in sundry shawls as they were walking home. Whilst

waiting for the carriage, Hoel again admired Mr. Kestell's noble head. No wonder, thought he, that his daughter is so good-looking. Elva meant to keep silence, but her father remarked:

"I shall be delighted if Mr. Heaton will bring you to see our views, that is, if you are making any stay here."

Elva softly stamped her foot with impatience. How very tiresome her father was to ask this stranger!

"Thank you, but my stay is short here; still, I think I have seldom seen a prettier neighbourhood. It combines, as a guide-book would say, 'perfect nature and perfect art.'"

"Then you are not entirely in love with pavements?"

"No, indeed, I used to live in the country as a boy, but one gets accustomed to one's surroundings. Still, I know some country fellows who cannot get reconciled to London. I made the acquaintance of one a little while ago; he is very clever, and is mastering all sorts of things in his spare time, which can only be of use to him in London, and yet he told me the craving for country life was his greatest hindrance."

"I should like to know that man," said Elva, forgetting her wrath. "I could never bear to live in London."

"By the way, I think Jesse Vicary said he came from this county."

"Jesse Vicary! We know him quite well, his sister is——"

"Elva, here is the carriage, make haste," said Mr. Kestell, quickly drawing his daughter away, so that Hoel could only bow and turn away.

Elva, once comfortably seated by her father's side, put her arm through his, and fell into a meditation, so she did not notice Mr. Kestell's unusual silence.

Outside the beautiful valley was bathed in soft light, every now and then the overhanging trees plunged them into deep shadow; then, when they emerged into a clearing, they could see the glimmer of the silent pools they were passing.

"Papa, isn't Rushbrook a perfect place; can you wonder that Jesse Vicary pines for it?"

There was no answer, and Elva turned quickly towards her father; his face expressed deep thought, and he did not seem to have heard her.

"Papa, what are you thinking of? Don't ask Mr. Hoel Fenner to Rushbrook. I don't like him."

Mr. Kestell was now all attention.

"I beg your pardon, dear. I was thinking of something Lord Cartmel wanted done for him. Mr. Hoel Fenner, oh, certainly not, I do not much care about these literary lions; they suit Mrs. Eagle Bennison, however."

Mr. Kestell laughed, and Elva wondered why his laugh sounded a little joyless.

"Poor old dad, you are tired; you hate parties. Well, here is our own dear pool."

"And make haste to bed, child, so as not to lose your roses and become as pale as Amice. Good night."

ABOUT CASTE.

When recently describing "The Mild Hindu,"* we promised, with the editor's permission, to give some further notes on the subject of Caste, which is the social basis of Hinduism.

As we then explained, the word is of Portuguese origin, "casta" having been applied by the early Portuguese conquerors to designate the peculiar divisions which they observed among the people. The Indian word is "jati," and "jatibheda" means the distinction of races. In what follows we take the authorities we have previously quoted; and especially Mr. W. J. Wilkins's work on "Modern Hinduism."

In the first place, we are not to suppose that caste, any more than pride of birth, is, or has always been, confined to the Hindus. The ancient Egyptians had a very clearly-defined caste system, and the trade-guilds of mediæval Europe reflected the same principle. It is one of heredity of faculty, or sanctity, or rank, or occupation; but it is not necessarily, and certainly does not now, imply any difference of race. In the beginning, however, it is probable that caste in India had a racial basis.

There are four great parent Castes: the Brahman, theoretically sprung from the mouth of Brahma; the Kshatriya, sprung from his arms; the Vaishya, sprung from his thigh; and the Sudra, sprung from his feet. To Brahmans, according to the Dharma-Shastra of Manu, were confided the duties of reading the Vedas, of teaching, sacrificing, and assisting others to sacrifice, of giving alms, and the very pleasing one of receiving gifts. To the

Kshatriya, the duties assigned were, to defend the people, to give alms, to sacrifice, to read the Vedas, and to shun women. To the Vaishya the duties assigned were, to keep herds of cattle, to bestow charity, to sacrifice, to lend money at interest, and to carry on trade. To the Sudras it was assigned to serve all other superior Castes without depreciating their worth. Thus, at the beginning, we see a sharp division into the priestly and scholarly class; the soldier and gentleman class; the farmer and trading class; and the substratum of hewers of wood and drawers of water—the "plebs" of the Roman, the "churls" of the Saxon races.

There is another account of the four-fold origin of the Hindu race—that the castes sprang from the four Vedas; but that which we have given is the one most commonly cited.

In Muir's "Old Sanskrit Texts" we have a more scientific explanation of the chief caste. The religious development of India is attached through the course of three thousand years to the word Brahma. This conception might be taken as the standard for estimating the progress of thought directed to divine things, as at every step taken by the latter it has gained a new form; while at the same time it has always embraced in itself the highest acquisition of the nation. The original signification of the word Brahma, as we easily discover in the Vedic hymns, is that of prayer—not praise or thanksgiving, but the invocation which, with the force of the will directed to God, seeks to draw Him to itself and to receive satisfaction from Him. From this oldest sense and form of Brahma was formed the masculine noun Brahma, which was the designation of those who pronounced the prayers, or performed the sacred ceremonies; and in nearly all the passages of the Rig Veda, in which it was thought that this word must refer to the Brahminical caste, this more extended sense must be substituted for the other more limited one. From this sense of the word Brahma, nothing was more natural than to convert this offerer of prayer into a particular description of the sacrificial priest; and so soon as the ritual began to be fixed, the functions which before were united in a single person, who both prayed to the gods and sacrificed to them, became separated, and a priesthood interposed itself between man and God. In many places of the liturgical and legal books the promise of every

* See ALL THE YEAR ROUND, Volume I., Third Series, page 390.

blessing is attached to the maintenance of a priest by the king. Inasmuch as he supports and honours the priest, the latter ensures to him the favour of the gods. So it was that the caste of the Brahmans arose and attained to power and consideration. First they were only the single domestic priests of the kings; then the dignity became hereditary in certain families; finally a union, occasioned by similarity of interests of these families in one larger community, was effected; and all this in reciprocal action with the progress made in other respects by theological doctrine and religious worship.

This theory, then, proceeds on the assumption that in process of time the spiritual authority came to exceed that of the temporal, and the position of the kings and priests was reversed. "If," says the work we have just quoted, "if we take into account the intellectual and moral influence which this class possessed, in virtue of the prerogative conceded to or usurped by them, and the religious feelings of the people, it is not difficult to comprehend how, in such a period of transition, powerful communities should arise amongst the domestic priests of petty kings and their families, should attain to the highest importance in every department of life, and should grow into a caste, which, like the ecclesiastical orders of the middle ages of Christianity, began to look upon secular authority as an effluence from the fulness of their power, to be conferred at their will; and how, on the other hand, the numerous Royal families should sink down into a nobility which possessed, indeed, the sole right to the kingly dignity; but at the same time, when elected by the people, required inauguration in order to their recognition by the priesthood, and were enforced above all things to employ only Brahmans as their counsellors."

Here we have a scientific explanation of the probable origin of the two highest castes—the priests and warriors; and it is not difficult to see how the creation of a third caste of cultivators and merchants would be indispensable. As for the fourth caste, the Sudras, it is noticeable that they differ from all the others in one important respect: they are not permitted to sacrifice, or to read the Vedas. It is therefore conceived that they were not originally part of the Hindu system which came from the north, but were engrafted into it, and were originally either the Aborigines of

the country, or the descendants of previous invaders. At any rate, the Sudras represent a conquered race, and have remained servile.

The reader has now both the traditionary and the scientific explanation of the origin of caste, and can have no difficulty in recognising that which is the more probable.

In the Scripture of Manu it is written: "Three Castes, the Brahman, Kshatriya, and Vaishya are twice-born; the fourth, the Sudra, once-born; there is no fifth." Then the writing declares as outcasts the descendants of mixed marriages of members of the four castes—such offspring being regarded by Manu as the offscouring of the earth. A list of out-caste tribes is given, with their pedigrees, which shows that they are all the descendants of some who were once in the castes. Such people are collectively called *Dasyas*—or slaves.

Caste as described in the Sacred Books is not as it now exists, however rigidly the sacred injunctions and definitions may have once been observed. The Brahman is still superior to all; but it may be doubted if any Brahman would proceed on the assumption of the *Dharma-Shastra*, that he is superior to all law, even to moral law, when it clashes with his worldly interests.

Nor is the intermarriage of castes altogether prohibited by custom, however it may be by precept. As a matter of fact, the members of different castes married in the time of Manu, perhaps even more freely than now, for in olden time, if a man of one caste took a wife from another caste, the punishment did not fall upon the offenders, but upon the children, who were reduced below the level of the lowest caste of their parents. But, nowadays, it is the parent who loses caste by marrying beneath him.

Meanwhile, in Bengal, the pure Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas are almost extinct, and of the four original castes only the Brahmans and Sudras now remain. But the present caste of Sudras consists really of the descendants of mixed castes, according to the old law by which the children of mixed marriages descended to a caste below that of the lowest of the two parents. This system is changed now, as we have said; but how it operated of old may be seen in the classification of the *Vaidya* and *Kayastha* sub-castes, which now include the most of the well-to-do

Hindus in Bengal, as Sudras. The Vaidyas are supposed to be the descendants of the offspring of a Brahman father and Vaishya mother; and the Kayastha are supposed to be descended from a Vaishya father and a Sudra mother. Both rank as Sudras, as do also the Chandala—the lowest caste of all—descended from a Sudra father and a Brahman mother.

Theoretically everywhere, and practically in a great many places, the Brahman remains supreme; but only among the very ignorant is he regarded as almost divine. All Brahmans, of course, are not priests; but this caste supplies the priesthood. The Pujari Brahmans are those who perform religious services for payment; and they are rather contemptuously looked down upon by their fellow Brahmans. The Guru, whose functions were explained in our previous article, is often, but not necessarily, a Brahman. When he is a Brahman, he is a very important person indeed, and receives a large amount of reverence. What we mean is, that Brahmans are respected for their birth, not for their employment; and that the respect among low-caste people is profound. They have been known to lift the dust from off a Brahman's feet, and place it upon their heads, and even to drink the water in which a Brahman's feet have been washed. The sanctity of the superior being may have some charm, but it is more often the fear of his curse, and of his supposed influence with the gods, that moves the baser vessel.

According to the Sacred Books, there are four stages in the Brahman's life to be systematically observed with piety; that is—the Brahmachari, or student-stage, when he is to engage in religious exercises from dawn till dewy eve, practise many abstinences, and undergo many penances; the Ghrihastha, or householder stage, when he chooses a wife with much pains, and has to practise many minute and laborious rites and ceremonies too tedious to narrate; the Vanaprastha, or meditative stage, when, at the approach of old age, he has to leave family and worldly affairs, go forth into the wilderness, live on herbs and roots, and spend his time in reading the Vedas, in acts of penance, and in continuous meditation; the Sanyasi, or ascetic stage, when further austerities are prescribed, but meditation is the chief employment.

It is the exception now for the Brahman to follow all the directions for all these

four periods. The system has been modified greatly, although there are still Brahmans, who, when growing old and infirm, will hand over their property to their sons, and betake themselves to Benares, or some other sacred spot, there to await their end in peaceful inertia. As a general rule, it may be said that the Brahmans living in towns are less careful of the laws of Manu than are those living in the country, where superstition is stronger.

Each caste has its district "Dal," or committee, which considers any reported violation of the caste rules, and pronounces sentence in case of proof. The offender must either submit to the punishment decreed, or be outcasted. In the latter case, none of the members of the caste will visit him, or eat with him, or allow their sons to marry into his family. The Dals, however, differ in rigour; and those of Calcutta permit their members to violate rules which are held severely binding elsewhere. This explains why some Hindus will sit down at table with Europeans, while others think themselves defiled if they are even touched by a European. Again, the voyage to Europe, which once meant ostracism, may now be expiated in many of the Dals by a very mild process of purification. Mr. Wilkins, indeed, says that in Bengal, with the exception of a few of the more orthodox Dals, Hindus may do almost anything they wish, except receive Christian baptism; and that even as regards that, some of the pundits have argued that there is nothing against it in their scriptures.

The authority of the Dal, nevertheless, remains very potent, and can, in some cases, rise superior to civil law. Thus, by civil law in India, it has been enacted that a Hindu widow may re-marry; yet, the power of prejudice wielded by the Dals has rendered this law practically a dead-letter.

In fact, it is not easy to understand how the caste system draws its distinctions. The Vaidyas and Kayasthas of Bengal are by caste-law Sudras. Yet they are regarded as gentlemen, and Brahmans associate with them on equal terms, except that they will not eat with them nor intermarry with them. But a Brahman will drink water which has been brought by Vaidya water-carriers, although he is forbidden to drink water from a vessel that has been touched by people of an inferior caste.

Again, the Bengal Brahmans are divided

into several Srenies, or classes, such as Rauries, Barenders, Vaidiks, and Saptasatis, with subdivisions of these, such as Kulins, Srotiyas, and Vangsajas. The subdivisions will exchange hospitalities, but will not intermarry. The Srenies will do neither.

"Sometimes," says Mr. Wilkins, "in a European household, in India, these caste distinctions present themselves in a ludicrous light. If a Hindu servant is sent for anything, from a child to a letter, that is in the hands of a low-caste servant, the article cannot be taken direct from the hand of the one who has it. It must be laid down on the ground or whatever is near, and taken up by the other. There must be no personal contact, nor must they touch the same article while the hand of the low-caste person is upon it, or they are defiled.

"Hindu servants will not object to assist in removing a piece of furniture with Christians; but if a sweeper or other low-caste man attempts to touch it, they will at once turn away. Of course it often happens that when a man does not wish to do anything, or is ordered to do what he regards as the work of another servant, he pleads caste difficulties where these rules do not at all apply."

Ostracism, by decree of the Dal, is not necessarily permanent. That is to say, a man who has been excommunicated may often regain admission to his caste by a money payment to provide a feast for the dead, or by undergoing some purifying ceremonies.

When we come to an attempt at classifying caste the statistics are bewildering. Thus, Dr. Wilson, who filled two portly volumes with details of the Brahman caste alone, divides this leading caste into twenty-five classes. But the subdivisions of these classes are infinite; and it was estimated by Sherring—author of "Hindu Tribes and Castes"—that there are one thousand eight hundred and eighty-six separate Brahminical tribes.

Popularly, the Brahmans are divided into ten great Septs—five on the north and five on the south of the Vindhya mountains; but the very first of the northern Septs consists, according to the Pundit Radha Krishna, of four hundred and sixty-nine classes.

These several varieties of the Brahman caste are, although all wearing "the Sacred Thread," and calling themselves "twice-born," really separate castes as far

as social relations are concerned. There is no more fellowship between them than there is between some Brahmans and some Kshatriyas (or Rajputs, as they are generally called now). The sacred caste, indeed, is no longer a compact unit; Brahmans follow every employment, from the priests of Benares and the pundits of Behar to the potato-growing peasants of Orissa.

Sir W. W. Hunter informs us that, in many parts of India, Brahmans may now be found earning their livelihood as porters, shepherds, cultivators, potters, and fishermen, alongside of others who would rather starve than demean themselves by manual labour, or touch food prepared by a man of another caste.

The same writer says that in 1864 he saw a Brahman felon trying to starve himself to death on account of scruples as to whether the birthplace of a North-Western Brahman, who had cooked his food, was of equal sanctity with his own birthplace.

The mixed castes still form the great body of the Hindoo population, and these mixed castes are practically trade-guilds as well as social organisations. In the census returns of 1881, no fewer than one hundred different castes are mentioned in Bengal alone; and according to this census report we learn that at least thirty castes are represented in every community in the province—other districts, of course, having a larger assortment. Taking these thirty indispensable castes, we find the population made up thus: The Brahman, who has a home in every hamlet either as priest or teacher, or in some superior service; the Rajput (Kshatriya) plays a similar secular part; the Baniya is the money-lender; the Barhi is the carpenter, and the Teli is the oilman, without whom no village can get along; the Chamar skins the cattle and mends the shoes of the people, while his wife officiates as midwife; the Dhobi is the washerman, and the Napit is the barber; the Karmakar is the blacksmith; the Kumhar the potter; the Madak and the Kandu are the confectioners and cooks; the Sunri sells wine, and the Barni and Tamoli prepare and sell the pan-leaf and betel-nut, so beloved of natives; the Tanti and Jugi weave the clothes for the village; the Mali supplies vegetables, as also plumes for the local shrine, and the Dom and Hari are the scavengers and the general sanitary supervisors. Besides these there will be the Kaibartha farmer, the

Gwalla cow-keeper, the Mallah boatman, the Tevi fisherman, the Kahar palkie-bearer, the Kayastha accountant and scribe, and the Bhuinya and the Khawar labourers and field hands.

Such are some of the complexities of the Hindu community—the caste system, which had an ethical basis, resolving itself now very much into a classification of employments, divided by jealous barriers and religious prejudices.

But besides subdivision into new castes, there is always a process of amalgamation and elevation going on. Thus the Rajputs (or old Kshatriyas), who number five hundred and ninety separate tribes, in different parts of India, have absorbed many warlike non-Aryan tribes in outlying provinces, and large bodies of aliens are said to have been, from time to time, incorporated with the Brahmans. The lower castes again have frequently changed their occupations, and raised themselves in the social scale. The old Vaishyas have handed over the tillage of the soil to the Sudras, and have become the merchants and bankers of India. In Southern India the goldsmith caste resisted the claims of the Brahmans to be the true spiritual guides, and re-naming themselves Acharyas, or religious teachers, assumed the sacred thread. The Dattas, a division of the Kayastha or water-caste of Bengal, once laid claim to rank next after the Brahmans, and although they did not succeed in it, they did renounce the former low position they had occupied in Hindu classification. The Shabras, a degraded caste of Eastern Bengal, formerly engaged in spirit-selling, have raised themselves into a respectable agricultural caste; and the Telis, an oil-pressing caste of Dacca, have forsaken their hereditary calling, and become important grain-merchants and bankers.

It is in these changes that we see what Sir William Hunter calls the plasticity, as well as the rigidity, of caste. "Its plasticity has enabled caste to adapt itself to widely-separated stages of social progress, and to incorporate the various ethical elements which make up the Indian people. Its rigidity has given strength and permanence to the corporate body thus formed. Hinduism is internally loosely coherent, but it has great powers of resistance to external pressure. Each caste is to some extent a trade-guild, a mutual assurance society, and a religious sect. As a trade-union, it insists upon the

proper training of the youth of its craft; regulates the wages of its members; deals with trade-delinquents; and promotes good-fellowship by social gatherings. The famous fabrics of mediæval India, and the chief local industries in our own day, were developed under the supervision of caste or trade-guilds of this sort. Such guilds may still be found in many parts of India, but not always with the same complete developement."

In fact, both the rigour and the general character of the caste system have undergone much modification through time, and especially under the English occupation. The principles which it embodies, and the prejudices which it fosters, cannot be eradicated, save by slow gradation; but the process is afoot, although we must not forget that one of the alleged causes of the last awful mutiny in India was the false report that the English Government intended to abolish caste. The English Government will never intend or attempt anything of the sort; but English example and intercourse may do what neither decree nor legislation would ever do. Hindu gentlemen are now coming freely among us, to study, to travel, and for trade. They go back more or less Europeanised in feeling and habit; and it is this sort of leaven which will probably have more effect in destroying caste, than all the efforts of Christian missionaries. Indeed, the caste prejudice is often ludicrously preserved by Hindu converts to Christianity.

No nation can progress properly with such trammels and barriers as a caste preserves; and the best friends of India—those who look forward to her taking a great and glorious part in human history—are those who most ardently desire its abolition. It has been a serviceable system, but it has outlived its usefulness, and is now an anachronism.

FROM AFAR.

Go thou thy way. I do not seek to share
The path which God hath girt with flowers for
thee,
It lies before thee wrapped in sunshine fair,
To know thee happy is enough for me.
If thou art safe, and sheltered in the ark
Of blessed home from earthly stress and strife,
It is enough for me, far off, to mark
God's smile, and love's, complete thy noble life.
It is enough for me to see thee share
Life's banquet with thy dearest, crowned with
flowers;
No sigh of mine shall vex the scented air,
No tear of mine shall mar thy happy hours.
I ask not for the children's bread, nor crumb
Cast to the dog whose love, like mine, is dumb!

I ask for nothing, dear, but this—but this—
 Free leave to love thee all my lone life through;
 But if God set a limit to thy bliss,
 And change joy's roses to grief's bitter rue,
 Then give me leave to whisper in thine ear
 Of love that lingers in a faithful heart,
 That holds thee, lorn and lonely, dearest—dear,
 Of love, whose idol and whose crown thou art!
 Nay, nay, I dream! Shall I forecast for thee
 Tears and a stricken heart? Now God forbid!
 I love thee, dear, it is enough for me.—
 What lies within the solemn future hid,
 Who knows? I know whate'er the years bring
 round
 To thee and me, love will be faithful found!

SHILLINGBURY SKETCHES.

A COMING TYPE.

I HAVE lately given an account of the disappearance of Samuel Dingley, and men of his character, from the life of rural England. He and his type are virtually gone, and, if we are to put any faith in the utterances of a certain school of social reformers, no successor will arise to take his place. According to these, the fertile fields of England must soon revert to Nature, and become swamp, and heath, and forest, the haunt of the otter, the bittern, and the red-deer, while their former inhabitants labour at starvation wage in the towns, when they are not in receipt of union relief. Now and then a high official, armed cap-à-pie with those statistical weapons, which may or may not be weapons of proof, breaks a lance with these dismal prophets; but, let him prove his point ever so clearly, he will never bring conviction to their souls, seeing that this would mean the upsetting of their darling theories. It may be granted that propositions based on statistics alone should be received with caution; but propositions, like those of the platform fanatic, should never be received at all if one wants to get at the truth of the matter in question.

To do the social reformer justice, he is not satisfied merely with standing up and declaring that there is an evil, namely, the unnatural growth of the town population at the expense of the country village. He is quite ready to propound a remedy, nay, a dozen remedies, for the mischief. He supports numerous societies, each with chairman, vice-chairman, and paid secretary, to carry out his ideas; and, with regard to the evil in question, he is loud of speech in favour of "leading back the working-classes from the stifling town alley to the fresh air of the country, and fixing them on the soil."

The picture he draws of a sturdy territorial democracy is a fascinating one, and one very likely to dazzle the eyes of inexperience; but my late observations down at Shillingbury taught me that it is for the most part misleading, and that disappointment will certainly wait upon those who take action believing it to be correct. It is a thousand pities that the theorists do not in this instance condescend to be practical for once in a way, and to start by acquiring a little truthful information upon one or two matters which must be important factors in any problems of "leading" or "fixing" they may be about to consider.

There is much good work to be done in other places beside the platform—that structure, indeed, often appears to be overweighted and over-crowded—and a contingent of workers of both sexes might very well be spared to go down into the Midlands or Eastern Counties and collect information on such subjects as these: First, whether there is anything like land-hunger among the peasants who are yet left in the country. Second, whether a life of toil on a patch of ground can be held up in colours alluring enough to entice out of the towns those who are there earning only a scanty living. And, third, whether the English labourer, urban as well as rural, after hearing a correct description of that Continental system of small farms, which is generally held up as the prime panacea, has exhibited any desire to live the life which the French or Belgian peasant lives.

Judging, however, from the spirit in which faddists of all schools treat the views of their opponents, there is little hope that such an embassy as the one suggested above will ever be sent; or, if sent, that its report would help the solution of the matter in hand. Some one with a taste for paradox once declared that the only people to make a movement march are those who steadily refuse to admit that there is any other side to a question beside the one they advocate. Whether our social reformers are making their movement march or not, I have no means of knowing; but they are certainly doing their best to realise the ideal of the paradoxical person quoted above.

One day during my late visit to Shillingbury I went over to Pudsey Heath, a favourite natural history hunting ground of mine in former days, and as I walked back I fell into that not over cheerful

mood which so often ensues when one re-seeks the haunts of one's youth and sets to work contrasting the present with the past. Suddenly I came upon a stalwart young fellow, hoeing in leisurely fashion amongst the green wheat of the field on which I was trespassing. From the evidence of my nose I gathered that he had recently been smoking; but there was no sign of a pipe when I came up. I noticed, however, a stealthy movement of his hand towards his pocket, and there was a lowering look in his eye as if he resented my interruption; though why a man shouldn't smoke while wheat hoeing I could not understand, supposing, of course, that he could afford to pay for his tobacco.

I remarked that it was a fine day—as a matter of fact it was nothing of the kind—and the young man grunted, and gave me a sidelong glance out of the corner of his eye. I asked him several commonplace questions; but I only got back monosyllabic answers. I showed that I knew something about the district, and of farming as well, and this had the effect of stopping the young man's mouth entirely. At last, trifling to a certain extent with strict veracity, I stated that I was come into these parts to write a report for a London journal as to the condition of the labouring classes, and this statement loosened his tongue. The young man had evidently a due sense of the dignity and importance of the modern newspaper press.

In spite of the ready working of my talisman, I saw that I must feel my way along very delicately. I was fully conscious that I stood in the presence of one of my new masters, one of those who in future will call the tune while I pay the piper; and I remembered also that the normal attitude of the rustic mind is one of suspicion. I began artfully by talking about the crops, remarking what fine promise of harvest there was in the wheat he was hoeing, and then went on to say that I supposed, before long, he himself would be hoeing his own wheat on his own ground.

Thomas Kirk, for this I understand was the young man's name, straightened his back and bent on the handle of his hoe preparatory to conversation.

"Ah! I see what tale you ha' got hold on," he began. "You're come down about these here allotments."

I replied that, though the question of allotments was not the prime cause of my

journey into those parts, yet it was one in which I had ever taken the deepest interest, and that I looked to the general adoption of the system as the one solution of our present social and industrial difficulties. In short, I found myself talking in such a strain as would have led any one to believe that I passed most of my time in the company of social reformers of the school already alluded to.

"Ah, you folks up in London may know a sight about most things; but if that's all you know about allotments, you ha' got summut to learn yet," said Thomas Kirk. "'T'pear to me to be a rum 'un as them folks as live in town and don't know whate from barley—you ain't such a big fule as most on 'em, you ain't—should know so much better what is good for us 'an we know ourselves."

I confess that, more than once, this very same idea had struck me while listening to the discourse of certain good friends of mine. On one occasion I ventured to put it forward; but I was immediately crushed by the remark that I was a retrogressive advocate of a policy of laissez faire, so I lapsed into silence.

"Just afore last 'lection time there was a sight o' talk about 'em, and there was a lot o' chaps as was fules enough to think as they would get a bit o' land for nothin'. I wouldn't mind havin' an allotment at that rate," said Thomas, with a bellow of laughter at the wit of his remark.

"But what a man gets for nothing is seldom any good to him," I remarked. "What we get by hard work is what benefits us."

"I don't hold with that nohow," said Thomas, making a vicious chop at a thistle. "There's Billy Dawes, as kept a little shop down town, had a nice little bit o' money left him from a brother o' his as went to the North. Bill ha' gav' up his shop, and don't do nothin' from one week's end to another. He got his two pound a week for nothin', as you say, and I can't see as it ha' done him any harm; and there's Squire Winsor, he get his rent without workin' for it, and the Parson, he take his tithe and do 'mazin little work, as far as I can see."

I somehow felt that Thomas was getting the better of me on this particular ground; so I barked back to the now historic battle cry of "Three acres and a cow," giving him a general outline of the wonderful results achieved by the hard-working peasantry of other lands. "But," I

remarked, by way of qualification, "it is only done by very hard work. The people I have been telling you about work much harder, I fancy, than most English labourers."

"That's the ticket," said Thomas. "Them as never did a stroke o' work in their lives are allus a tellin' of us what a fine thing hard work is. I ain't over fond o' hard work myself; no more would you be if you took a turn at grass cuttin' to mow an acre a day."

"But it makes all the difference," I said, "whether you work for yourself or for another man."

"'Tain't no good working for yourself if you don't get nothin' for your labour. There's them chaps over at Newton Sodbury, they ha' all on 'em got allotments, and one on 'em told me t'other day as, arter workin' all his spare time when he might ha' been a sittin' a doin' o' nothin', and spendin' nobody knows what over seed, he sold his crop o' taters for half-a-sovereign. They can grow taters down in the Fens cheaper 'an we can grow 'em here, so what's the use of our sweatin' ourselves for nothin'?"

This speech proved William to be a political economist. Perhaps, indeed, he had attained to that level of intelligence without knowing it. His doctrines were as sound as anything one could ever hear at a Cobden Club dinner. It had been a puzzle to me, before this, how it was that so many of the social reformers I had met were of the strictest and most scientific of Cobdenites as far as principles went; but only so far. Whenever the promotion of any of their pet schemes called for the adoption of some practice diametrically opposed to the principles above named, they took up this practice without a blush.

For instance, those reformers of whom I have already spoken, in their favourite scheme of "fixing the labourer on the soil," cast to the winds the principle that we should work to produce whatever our surrounding most favours. Well primed with the last sixpenny hand-book on spade husbandry, they ideally put the labourer in possession of his patch of ground; and then—also ideally—set him to work to make his fortune by cultivating mustard and cress, or sun-flowers, or asparagus, or gooseberries, or some other such crop as easily produced and as easily taken to market.

I fully expect before long to come across

a hand-book demonstrating that the way out of our present condition of congestion and depression will only be found in the cultivation of sugar and cotton in the southern counties, and of the vine and the olive on the Welsh hills.

"And you was a talkin' about the people over the water, in foreign parts. If a man can get a livin' off an acre o' land it must be very different land, or they must have very different weather to what we have here. You ha' been in them parts, I suppose, and can tell us how they manage it."

"I don't think the soil is better, but there is certainly more sunshine."

"Ah, that's just what it is. If you get sun, you can grow anything. But, even as it is, they have to work pretty hard, haven't they?"

I replied in the affirmative, and gave Thomas Kirk an account of the working day of the French or Belgian peasant and his wife; of the strenuous toil which began before sunrise, and lasted till after sunset; of the dogged resolve that not a day should pass without a few pence being added to the family hoard; of the purse that was always made for the daughter's marriage; and of the shelter and support for which the parent or grandparent never asked in vain. Thomas asked me many questions on every conceivable point, and seemed only moderately satisfied with the answers I returned; and he gave a sniff of contempt, I fancied, when I told him that the institution of "out-door relief" was unknown in France. Probably he deemed it a very poor sort of country, where a man abstained from beer and tobacco in order to support his father and mother, as compared with his own, where he can, with a little perseverance, cast that burthen upon the shoulders of the community.

I tried hard to induce Thomas Kirk to let me know whether his ambition was tending, and what might be the chief objects of his desire; but I found it hard to get anything like a positive statement from him. On one point, a negative one, he was quite decided. I asked him whether, at the next election, he would be willing to vote for any candidate who would be ready to support a bill for "Continentalising" our rural districts, by bringing him and his like into the condition of the French peasant, whose life I had just described. Thomas looked at me steadily for a minute or two, as if he thought I was

joking, and then said that he didn't know a sight about laws, and them as made 'em; but one thing he did know, and this was that no Member o' Parliament would ever make him work fourteen hours out of the twenty-four, whether he was to work for a master, or for himself.

I have several times, since my interview with him, fancied that Thomas Kirk, agricultural labourer though he was, was not well enough acquainted with the prick of poverty to be of much service to my friends of the platform. He was well clad; his healthy face and sturdy frame told no tale of want of food; he could afford the luxury of a whiff of tobacco, and his work, as he chopped leisurely at the thistles and docks in that fresh April air, seemed little more than pleasant exercise. His position certainly is not an ideal one. The element of Socialism in the administration of the Poor Law—the tacitly acknowledged principle of which is, that the man who is idle and drunken enough to fall into want, may call upon his thrifty and sober fellow-citizens to support him—has crushed out of him that sturdy spirit of independence which was once supposed to be so essentially English. If we could be sure that he would regain this through the possession of one, two, or ten acres of land, in Heaven's name let him have them. Thomas Kirk, as I found him, does not particularly object to a sauntering kind of labour, for a low rate of wages, and he will never make a struggle for independence if he sees that independence is only to be obtained by hard work.

As I said good-bye to Thomas and walked away, I saw plainly that he was not a social reformer of the newest pattern. He exhibited an obsolete desire to know all about the special remedy which his town friends are now prescribing for him before he would say that it was good or bad, herein showing his inferiority to those ladies and gentlemen who, having lived in Bloomsbury or St. John's Wood all their lives, naturally know everything about rural economy. There is no hesitation about them. The plan which fits their theory is the right one, and there is no more to be said in the matter. There is, however, one little flaw in the mainspring of this wonderful machine of theirs, which will soon become apparent, should the machine ever be set in motion. They assume that, when Thomas Kirk is wound up and set going on his new patch of

land, he will fall to and work his fourteen hours a day just like Jacques Bonhomme on the other side of the Channel; but, bearing in mind the talk I had with him that day in the wheat field, this assumption appears to be a very bold one, and one which I should refuse to grant—even to a lady social reformer.

Since my return to town I have often wondered how it is that some of these well-meaning restless people do not leave awhile their platforms and preaching, and try to make an impression, by practical illustration, on John Bull's stolid brain. They are always girding at him for his obtuseness and insensibility to ideas, and being such an one as he is, what wonder is there that he should decline to accept their theories, however symmetrically constructed? Let them, for once, descend to practice. Let a married couple out of their ranks hire a cottage and the requisite quantity of land, and go and cultivate it, and live as they are always exhorting Thomas Kirk to live. At the end of two years, let them give to the world their experience, both as to how they liked the life, and what manner of balance-sheet they have to show. A practical example like this will come within the range of John Bull's powers of perception, and will help their movement on more than ten years of speech-making, if it prove successful, and they, at all events, ought to have no doubt as to its success. I could name several couples amongst the advanced thinkers of my acquaintance who are by no means deficient in physical power, albeit a little pasty-faced and smoke-dried through long residence in London, and for them the experiment suggested above would be little more than a prolonged country holiday, with a sense of duty fulfilled thrown in. But I fear, in spite of all our progress, that people nowadays take to preaching in preference to practice quite as readily as they did in the reign of King Solomon.

IN A GONDOLA.

"GÓNDOLA, Signor, Góndola!" That is the cry from a dozen brown, hearty throats, at the wayfarer who approaches the side of the embankment by the Doge's Palace in Venice. This is the prime gondola-stand of the city. Some of the boats are beautiful creatures. You know a perfect gondola is supposed to be animate; and

therefore I may discuss it as if it were a living being. The silvery glitter of the prow, or "ferro," with its big metal hatchet, cloven in the shape of teeth, curves towards you like the stately head of a swan. Then the wood-work of your cabin, though black as coal, is carved not inelegantly. A brazen coronet, mounted in front of the cabin, will give you a patent of nobility as long as you use the gondola. And if it is cold, as it well knows how to be in Venice ere the summer suns blaze upon the water, the black, woolly sheepskin, which is part of the furniture of a respectable boat, may help to keep you warm.

A moment after you have taken your seat, you feel yourself swinging smoothly round; and you are fairly afloat in the lagoon. At first the sensation is a little odd. A gondola, you know, is built with a designed lean to one side. It is also very thin in the boards; and its curve is so precise, that only the smallest possible extent of the middle outer framework lies on the water. You sit in it, therefore, as if you were in the hollow of a feather which has fallen concavely into a pool. And your sinewy, good-natured oarsman finds it so easy to propel you, thus lightly poised, that he sings withal as he works, shows his teeth to you in an amiable grin whenever you look his way, and proffers all the information about Venice and her magnificence that it is in the power of a simple, unlettered, but home-bred Venetian to afford.

Soon, however, the odd sensation is quite displaced. The awful thought that there was some likelihood of "mal de mer" in a gondola, and on water calm as a farmyard duck-pond, passes away for good and all. The fascination of the gentle see-saw grows stronger every moment; and as, stretched at full length, with your head reclining against the sheepskin, and your feet resting on the foot-stool at the other extremity of the cabin, you glide up the waterways and down them, you begin that love for Venice which, in a week or two, will, as sure as death, develope into infatuation.

Some day, it is to be hoped, the municipality of Venice will permit the gondolas to be as gay as they used to be. It was with the old Venetians as with our dames and gallants of the sixteenth century: as their wealth waxed they grew most unconscionable in their personal adornments. It was no uncommon thing for a senator's

wife to carry a hundred thousand ducats' worth of trinkets strung about her fair form. In domestic life silver and gold plate became fashionable with the rich; and here, likewise, much good, marketable coin was locked up, to the detriment of trade in the most commercial city of the world. Luxury in furniture naturally involved luxurious fittings for the family coaches—the gondolas. Thus it chanced that the cerulean waters of the canals were made bewitching by multitudes of fantastic shapes in gold and silver, the cabins and decks of which charmed the eye with their brocades, and silks, and satins, in purple and crimson, yellow, scarlet, green, and gold.

What a blend of colours one might have seen from the Rialto Bridge any day, three or four hundred years ago! The contrast between those times and ours is somewhat humbling. The bridge itself is improved into a handsome stone erection, still massed with a double row of shops and booths. But the outlook of the present time is relatively dull. Half-a-dozen black serpentine gondolas, filled with American travelling-trunks, will be seen winding their laborious way to the railway station. A steamboat or two will shoot, with distressful output of smoke, from one pier to another in their perambulation of the Grand Canal. And, perhaps, one big barge will creep heavily and slowly into full sight, laden with hay cut from the mainland meadows, and brought into Venice, not for the consumption of her horses—since she has none—but for the kine, who, in many a shed, supply the city with their milk.

The Senate of Venice placed an embargo upon what it conceived to be an injurious display of luxury. Thenceforward the gondolas put on black, and in black they have mourned ever since. But, as I have said, the present civic rulers of the place, descendants of greater forefathers, who ruled a realm instead of a city, may just as well repeal, or nullify by example, a law which nowadays holds rather by force of custom than because of its actual legality. There will be fewer "palaces" to let at absurdly trivial rentals, when Venice is made more attractive by the aid of charms which are less suggestive of the graces of mere decay.

"Will you go out on the water or in among the 'canaletti,' signor?"

"Why, out on the lagoon, to be sure!"

Upon such a day—for it is warm spring

weather—it were a thousand pities to grope between tall houses, in a stream of almost stagnant water no wider than a Midland ditch.

And so, with a fresh catch of song, of a freer and more breezy kind, befitting the broader arena of our excursion, Jacopo turns the “ferro,” as if upon a pivot, and away we glide towards the burnished distance of the waters.

Now, if need be, it were easy to pay several desirable visits in the outskirts of Venice. Yonder is the crimson islet of the Armenian Monastery. I call it “crimson,” because its campanile and its walls are the colour of the summer sky at sundown. Else it is not devoid of greenery to enliven its buildings. Every one goes to the Armenians, if there be but three or four days at disposal for all Venice and her surroundings. So be it; for that reason will I not go. Lord Byron was in some respects a notable man; and he patronised these Armenians. The pen he used in the monastery is not in itself a wonder of the world; but it is a wonder of the monastery. That is what the people go thither to see, and much good may the spectacle do them. But the worthy monks, who are erudite, clever men, are not above laughing at our country people for their imbecility. They do not think so much of Lord Byron’s memory as perhaps Lord Byron himself still supposes.

The red campanile of San Lazzaro may therefore be left behind, with its edging of greensward and its steel-grey background of the waters, beset with many a bronzed and orange-coloured sail.

Beyond San Lazzaro is the Lido—that laughing resort of Venice in her holiday moods. Ah! the Lido is indeed delightful, with its cosy little restaurants set by the water-side, and its tables with their pyramids of fruit inviting to breakfast under the fresh green of the trellised vines; with its varnished and gabled chalets bowered in little gardens, retreats for the gods, within view of Venice, and all her fairy towers and domes on one side, and on the other gazing at the blue of the Adriatic, and the white capped waves which plunge with a roar upon the shelly shingle of the Lido’s eastern line; with its miles-long sea walk on the embankment that leads towards Malamocco, passing by forts which are still guarded as zealously as if hundred-ton guns were but imaginative vagaries, and passing vineyard after vineyard and acres upon acres of useful kitchen

stuffs; even with its cemeteries, devoted to the Hebrews, who come here from the unsavoury Ghetto of the western skirts of Venice, to lie in green hollows guarded from all winds and shone on by the unpolluted sun, the Lido is pleasant from end to end, and Venice would lose much if she lost this fair islet and break-water, whither every hour of the day tiny steamers carry her revellers in quest of sea air, flowers, and welcome change.

No, we will not go to the Lido, or else it were impossible to leave it until the evening brume steals over the waters, insinuating the approach of night.

What is that other little islet to the north of Venice—red all over, as if but a pile of new-baked bricks, enough to build a city—and so near that it may be reached in a few urgent minutes?

“Oh, that, signor, is the cemetery. Ave Maria! May it be many years before I go there, with my heels to the front!”

“Amen, Jacopo, since you wish it. It is the Christian cemetery, I suppose?”

“Yes, signor; the Jews may go to the Lido; and a good place, too, with a thorn hedge on one side that can tear a strong coat to rags, and walls on the other. There was a Jew once in our ‘calle,’ signor, and he came to Venice so poor that he ate our leavings, and they were very little. But he saved his ‘soldi’ like no other man that ever was, I should think, and for all he lived on the bits of others, he soon had more money than all the rest of us in the ‘calle’ put together. Then he took to trade, and the lottery, and, signor, in ten years he was a rich man; and now he lies in the Lido with a lot of fine words over him—‘reproachless citizen, devoted husband,’ and that sort. Well, well, if only it had pleased the Madonna to make me a Jew! But I would have been Catholic all the same. And then perhaps I should be no better off than I am now. So what good in grumbling!”

It was not likely we should go to the cemetery, after rejecting the Lido. But we crossed the procession of some others, who were bent thither for their long sleep. One of the dead was a patrician, whose ancestors did much for Venice nearly a thousand years ago. He, however, had accepted the new order of things, and was democratic. With his sires’ tombs in the churches, towering forty feet above the bystander, and amazing in their sculptured glories, he would have nothing to do, even if it had been permitted him

to lay his bones with theirs. He proposed to lie in a niche, like a chandler or a chicken-merchant, girdled by the high, ugly red walls, which make the island look like a fortification.

These dead went to their tombs in their gondolas, with candles on each side of them. Some priests of distinction followed in other gondolas, with thurifers, acolytes, a number of palsied old pensioners of the defunct, deputations of different associations and guilds, with banners and mortuary wreaths so huge that two men carried one between them. It was a pretty scene, although the dead lay under black palls. The clerics chatted and took snuff; the pensioners mumbled and drew in the salt air through their leathery old nostrils, now begging a pinch of snuff from some opulent companion, and now nodding off into incipient naps; the acolytes grinned at each other, or played tricks with the candles, or dabbled their fingers in the amaranthine water; and the deputies of guilds argued about wages and the advisability of instituting a strike or two by way of reminding employers of their duty. Behind the procession were the tall, green-shuttered houses of the city, somewhat mildewed as to their bases, and decorated by incredible bunting of clothes from the wash. In front the red cemetery and the glistening water. And beyond, over distant islets and towers, and the more distant haze of the mainland, with its trees and houses, the Titanic shapes of the Alps, with half their snow in the clouds.

"Then is it not the same in your country when a man departs?" asked Jacopo.

"By no means. It is not as picturesque, in the first place. For my part, I think I should like to die in Venice; and you, Jacopo, shall row me to the cemetery, like those others yonder."

"Whenever you please, signor. I am sure it will not be difficult to arrange."

North of the cemetery is the island of Murano, famous for many reasons. Like every other spot of land in this favoured pool, it is pleasant to look upon. It is somewhat extensive also: a Venice in miniature, with back streets (the 'canaletti'), and mildew, and green shutters, and much linen hanging to dry from the windows of dilapidated houses. But it has no Doge's Palace, no S. Marco, no picture galleries, and, of course, few memories to vie with those of the greater city.

It is mainly a painter's city nowadays. The artist is assumed to be indifferent to evil smells, to dirt, unwashed children, and rickety habitations, so they combine, after their fashion, to make up well on canvas.

The Cathedral of Murano is, indeed, still enchanting in a plaintive way. What wondrous mosaics are those on its uneven flooring! Older, too, than the equally marvellous work of San Marco itself. But they have been ruthlessly trodden upon, as they were like to be: the patterns in part obliterated, the pieces in part displaced. Its pillars, also, are of a rude type, recalling the dependence of those early architects upon the skill of men from the seat of the Byzantine Empire. Indeed, it is probable the craftsmen were Greeks to the core. But the atmosphere of the church, as of the whole place, is subdued, damp, and depressing. One gets tired of the blotches of green mould and mildew upon the stonework. They provoke sneezing. The woman who officiates as sacristan in this forlorn temple, counteracts the damp with snuff; and, on the homœopathic principle, methinks she does wisely, if not well.

But there is an industry of Murano, which, in our eyes, and in the esteem of that other great shop-keeping nation of old, the Venetians themselves, still redeems it from the insignificance of a mere ruin, a mere place for sentimental tears. Are not its glass beads dispersed all over the world in witness of this industry? I dare say, three hundred years ago, it was such pretty trifles from this little island that, more than aught else, ensnared the hearts of many a nation of noble savages. The beads were forerunners to firewater, and firewater led to extinction. Thus, in no small way, Murano has helped forward what, for the sake of euphony, we may call "the advance of civilisation."

This is a very fair brag for a pany islet in the Adriatic. But, in those days, Murano was something more than a bead-factory, and the source of chandeliers and wine-glasses innumerable. It was, "both from its sweet air and its sweet situation, a place for nymphs and goddesses" to dwell in. Its cypress-groves and orange-gardens attracted such worthies as Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese, Aretino, and the great rulers of the Republic, even as the bathing machines and cafés of the Lido, in our days, win the affections, among others, of sedate butcher boys and wearied retailers of haberdashery.

What Attic shafts of talk enlivened the dainty suppers which were here laid under the summer skies, 'mid the perfume of the orange-blossom! Hither also, in the first days of "first editions," the great Aldo Manutius, that prince of publishers, drew his troop of scholars, so they might work in tranquillity. And, when their day's labour was o'er, the tired students would take gondola for the greater city, and meet in stately drawing-room for Greek conversation! Devoted editors, and compilers, and translators, whose every diversion was designed to be educative!

However, the hard fingers of time have rubbed off these ancient graces of Murano to a very large extent. Its meagre gardens do not now compel admiration. Even the beads, chandeliers, glass flagons, and glass dishes and cups, which are arranged with a splendour of coruscation in the public rooms, do not seem so very extraordinary. Without doubt an Inca of the fifteenth century would have lost his sense at the sight of such magnificence, and would willingly have exchanged a palace or two of solid gold for as much of their contents as he could carry in his own unaided hands. But then, the Incas did not know very much. It is some hundreds of years since they lived, and we, in our age, are born with the critical sense, and the craving for wonders of the supremely stupendous kind ere we bend the knee to them.

"Away, then, my good Jacopo; it is better to be in the open, than in the pent, foul highways of Murano. Row as near to the Alps as possible."

"But they are a long way, signor; and if we were to go until nightfall we should get no nearer to them than now."

"At least, we may get to Torcello?" an islet to which the first Venetians of Rialto were much indebted.

But, no; Jacopo has the vices coincident with his many good qualities. Exercise is all very well; but when it comes to exertion, it is displeasing to him. He is content to idle about the adjacent waters of Venice, moving his boat, as it were, by the mere breath of his lungs. He is unwilling to row six full miles across the lagoon, with the knowledge that the six full miles will be doubled ere his day's work be ended.

This is a pity; for Torcello is curious. It is especially interesting if you have been to that other ancient city to the north-east, now languishing amid a monstrous accumulation of ruined statues,

and columns, and walls, fair to look upon. I mean Aquileia. Close, indeed, is the affinity between Aquileia, the desolate, and Venice, the frequented. It is worth while to recall it. Listen, then, to the words of an old Doge, a Dandolo, taken from his printed chronicle:

"The Evangelist, Mark, founded the Catholic Church in Aquileia in the year of Jesus Christ, Our Lord, 48. Having preached the Gospel in Rome, with Peter, at Peter's bidding he came to Aquileia, where a church was built, and his preachings were innumerable. In the course of his roamings through the marshes in a boat, he touched the island of Rialto; and having attached his boat to the shore, an angel of God appeared to him and said: 'Peace be with thee, Mark. In this place shall thy body come to rest.' The angel proceeded to foretell the sufferings and death which were to intervene ere he should lie in Rialto. To all which Mark replied: 'Thy will be done, Lord.'"

Many centuries passed before this angelic prophecy was fulfilled. It was the year 802 A.D., and the third of the Doges was ruling in Rialto. Envoys from Venice then chanced in Alexandria to meet two monks, who there had charge of the church in which St. Mark's relics were guarded. The monks bewailed their insecurity. The Moors (Arabs) of Cairo constantly made raids upon the place, carrying off whatever of value they could seize. It was a wonder the holy relic had been spared so long. When they heard this, the Venetians begged to have the body to take back with them to Venice. At first the monks dared not consent. "We should," they said, "be in a grievous plight if, having done this, it were to become known." The Venetians, no doubt, won them over with golden arguments. The body was found wrapped in a silken robe, sealed with many seals. From this covering it was abstracted, so that the seals appeared not to have been broken. It was then packed in a box with a quantity of pork and grass. The pork was designed to vex the Mahomedan custom-officers, who, when they saw it, meddled no farther with the box, and let it go. In this way, enveloped in a ravishingly aromatic cloud, the relic was transported to Venice, where it now lies beneath the high altar of St. Mark's.

All the old importance of Aquileia has passed, with St. Mark, to Rialto. It is now but a fever-stricken little hamlet,

on the marshy border of the Adriatic, at its most northern part. But it has a Basilica second to none upon the Adriatic shores. Here one sees, as in Torcello, the episcopal tribune on a dais by the altar, and the seats for the inferior clergy arranged in circular fashion about it. How solid and grotesque are the carvings of its capitals! How well worthy of prolonged study its ancient frescoes and monuments! But it is hardly less desolate than Babylon herself. To view the baptistry—a high, isolated chamber near the north-western corner—I set three chairs one upon the other, and scaled them like a ladder. But ere I had reached my vantage post, down with a ruinous crash fell all the chairs, a piteous comminglement of broken legs and parted trunks. The noise echoed and re-echoed from the solemn old vaulting overhead, and then died away into nothingness. No one heeded it. I had entered the cathedral unguided. Of all the many clergy who of old frequented its stalls, but one is left. Even the sacristan gives but his leisure hours to it. It is as forlorn, at this day, as when Attila and his Huns, ages ago, passed their desecrating hands of ravage over it.

"Back to the Piazzetta, Jacopo. It is dolorous this thinking of the past."

"Why yes, signor, of course it is. It was the year I took Elisabetta home for wife that I paid for my first lottery ticket. Every week since, and it is twenty, quite twenty years now, a franc has gone to the Government, and never a prize to show for it. Why, signor, I should—Holy Maria, there's no doubt of it—I should be a rich man if I had all the francs I have paid to the lottery. Oh! per Bacco! it is hard to think of the past—that it is!"

"You are a singular fool, my dear Jacopo, to waste your money in that way."

"Waste! Well no, it is not quite waste, after all. Now that I think of it, signor, I will tell you truly, there is something more in it than you think."

"Yes, I should like to hear all you can have to say in favour of your stupidity."

"Don't you see, signor? Life is rather mild—too quiet, tame, and that sort of thing for some of us; though they do say we Venetians have no more spirit than lambs. Ah! you should have seen us in the siege of '48! Well, we take our cup of hope every week, just as you strangers in

England, I have heard, drink a little gin every day, for the spirits. It helps us on. And besides, when all's said, I may win even now, at this very hour, a sum of money enough to buy a palace in the Grand Canal, and be a rich man ever after. Oh, may God and all His saints grant it!"

Sauntering over the sunlit waters, we inch by inch return to the beautiful city of domes and towers and high old buildings, with green shutters and clothes hung out to dry. Jacopo is full to the throat of gossip and reflections, which have a trick of falling away obliquely into a ballad about a girl's black eyes, or a catch of fish. But though I have been uncivil enough to call him a fool to his face, he is not really anything like a fool. I do not think Venice can breed fools. Her beggars are the nearest to them; but they are far too shrewd, far too fond of the sun and idleness to be convicted of systematic idleness. Venice has a multitude of charitable institutions, in which men may live without working. I myself have half thought of striving for admission to one, for it is on the whole quite enough pleasure to exist here, without care for the luxuries that impudently press themselves upon our attention in England under the guise of necessities. But it is well that I am disqualified for such happy inertia. In the long run it does not agree with British blood.

And so farewell, Jacopo; we have had a very pleasant saunter. I shall go off to England to-morrow. Enough of the gondola. "Take it away, I shall not use it again," as the last of the Doges said to his valet, when he removed his ducal coronet after the surrender of the Venetian State to Napoleon.

IN A PLACE OF SECURITY.

A STORY IN THREE CHAPTERS.

By FREDERICK TALBOT.

CHAPTER I.

"THERE was a sound of revelry by night" within the usually quiet precincts of Bedford Square. Carriages and cabs drove up in quick succession and deposited their inmates upon the strip of carpet that led the way up the broad steps of No. 88. Striped awnings fluttered overhead, and the solid old house vibrated to the footsteps of dancers and rang with the

tuneful strains of fiddles and clarionets. It was not exactly a fashionable gathering, perhaps, although rank and fashion were duly represented; but there were literary lions in plenty; learned professors brought their wives and daughters; dark-skinned Orientals were there in flowing robes and adorned with glittering jewels. There was a yellow beauty from China, and a brown Ranees from India, with a homely face in a gorgeous setting of gold and precious stones; there were fair Americans, delicate and fragile as porcelain; and a black Princess from the Congo, with a massive gold ring through her nose, attracted some attention.

But, of all the young women present, there was none to compare—at all events in the opinion of Herbert Shepstone, the eldest son of the house—with pretty Louise Cornely, with her dark, wavy hair, classic profile, and deep violet eyes, that shone upon the observer with a soft mysterious radiance when she raised her dark-fringed eyelids and turned towards him.

Louise was a friend of the house, and, if she had a chaperon at all, it was Mrs. Shepstone herself, who, in her capacity of hostess, was much too busy to look after her. Hence there was nobody to tell her that she was dancing too much with Mr. Herbert. But then he was most to blame for insisting on filling up her programme, and, after all, she liked him best, and it was a real pleasure to dance with him. As for Colonel Shepstone, who might have given his son a hint upon the matter, he was quite out of his element in a ball-room, and had retired to a quiet corner with two or three learned friends, where they were discussing some interesting point connected with Buddhist inscriptions in India. Colonel Shepstone was noted as an Orientalist, and also as a rich virtuoso and collector.

But the talk between the Colonel and his friends was not altogether of a rigidly scientific character. There was an element of personal gossip in it.

"I see you have got Cornely's daughter here," said Professor Higgins, a man with a very ugly but kindly and humorous face, "and a sweet-looking young thing she is," continued the professor. "I hope she has heard nothing—"

"About what?" asked the Colonel, sharply.

"Oh, there is nothing definite; but there are rumours that Cornely's expedition has come to grief, and there are fears as to his safety."

"Oh, Cornely is all right," said the Colonel, dogmatically. "A man like that knows how to take care of himself."

From Colonel Shepstone's manner it was evident that Mr. Cornely was no great favourite of his. Cornely, indeed, might be called a professional explorer. He hunted down buried cities and ancient burial places. He dug, he excavated, he brought home all kinds of objects, and sold them sometimes to public museums, both home and foreign, sometimes to private collectors like Colonel Shepstone. Some hard bargains he had driven with the latter had irritated the Colonel against him. And then Cornely, who was a great linguist, had severely criticised some of the Colonel's translations. Still, Shepstone was too just a man to visit the misdoings of the father upon the daughter. Louise was the bosom friend of his daughter Bessie, and he had never objected to that friendship. But when, in the course of the evening, a good-natured female friend enquired, "If it were really the case, as everybody said, that Herbert was engaged to Miss Cornely—his attentions were so marked," the Colonel, while dismissing the notion with a laugh, inwardly resolved that he would give Master Herbert a good talking to on the morrow.

But the evils of procrastination were once more exemplified. Before the evening was over Herbert had plainly told his love to Louise, and had made the delightful discovery that his affection was warmly reciprocated. All this had been settled during the progress of a dance which the lovers had sat out together in a sheltered nook of the conservatory. The girl's chief misgiving was, "What will Bessie say to me?" for certainly their friendship had not been designed for any such result. The two girls had drawn from the same cast at the museum; it was Antinous, and certainly, now that Louise came to think of it, the head was just like Bertie's. They had studied the same books, practised the same music, and had agreed that one day they would share the same studio, and devote themselves to art, and to kindred subjects in the spirit of free and unfettered womanhood. But all this time Bertie was an unknown quantity. He was with his regiment in the East, and it was only within the last four months, when the young man had been quartered at Aldershot, that Louise had come to know him; and there was something so fresh and new about him, that when he began

to make love to her she found him quite irresistible.

And Bessie was indeed angry and indignant when in the course of the evening Bertie whispered to her the secret. "Rubbish," she said. "Father will never permit it. And Louise is a regular little serpent. Why, only a little while ago, I know she thought of nothing but her father's handsome secretary, George Melitus, and I am sure she wears his portrait next her heart. I have noticed it ever since he left, and she will not show it to me or to anybody."

Bertie told his sister she was a little traitress, which did not mend matters. But Bessie had landed the shaft of jealousy fairly and truly in his manly breast. For he had noticed this locket, or whatever it was that Louise thus cherished, nestled snugly within her corsage, just out of sight, except when partially revealed in the exertion of the dance. In the next waltz that he danced with Louise, Herbert artfully introduced the subject:

"Dearest," he whispered, as they rested for a moment after a long spin, "you must wear my portrait now instead of that locket you treasure so carefully."

Louise looked up with a shade of alarm in her violet eyes.

"It is not a locket," she said, "it is an amulet, a charm."

"May I look at it?" asked Bertie, holding out his hand.

"Indeed, no!" replied Louise. "It is my secret, and you must not ask anything about it."

Bertie's face clouded a little.

"But if I were your husband—and now I am your promised spouse—you would tell me!"

Louise looked distressed as she replied:

"I can't make such wild suppositions; but when my father comes home, which will be soon I hope, then I can tell you all about it."

"Ah! then George Melitus will be home, too," suggested Herbert, jealously.

"Has Bessie been talking to you about George?" asked Louise, with an injured air. "He is a kind of cousin, you know. Bessie does not like him; but he is a nice boy—a distant cousin of ours, and so devoted to papa. But you don't know all our family," she continued, as if anxious to change the subject. "There is Aunt Irene; she is so kind and good, but suffers so much; and there is Constantia, George's sister, you know, who helps me to take

care of aunt. I am glad you did not see Constantia first; she is like me, people say, the same size and figure."

"I can imagine she is charming," said Herbert, with an adoring smile.

"Ah! but she is more so."

Just then a clock on a bracket hard by gave a warning note, and Louise glanced hastily at her watch.

"It is midnight, Bertie, and I must be gone. Will you see if anybody has come for me?"

"Don't your spells work after midnight, you little witch," said Bertie, laughing.

"No, indeed, you shall not go yet."

But Colonel Shepstone himself appeared upon the scene.

"Miss Cornely, your people have come for you. I am sorry we are to lose you so soon; but I know how anxious you are."

And the Colonel, taking Louise under his wing, conducted her to the hall, where her faithful attendants, Luigi and Nurse Blake, were waiting to convey her home. Bertie could only wave a silent farewell; for the Colonel angrily ordered him off to look after his other guests, and the Colonel's word was law in his own household.

It was only a stone's throw from Bedford Square to the Russell Mansions, where the Cornelys occupied a flat on the first floor. Everything was handsomely appointed about the place. Cornely's profession might be a risky one; but apparently it was lucrative enough, for the whole household bore the appearance of comfort, if not of opulence. Turkey carpets deadened the footsteps. Indian rugs, and richly-carved objects in black wood and sandal wood, were scattered about. A musky, Oriental perfume hung about everything.

As Louise entered the portals of her own home, a young woman—it was Constantia—glided to meet her.

"All is well, dear," she said, kissing her. "Your aunt is enjoying a peaceful sleep; and now I will help you to undress, and put you to bed."

"Indeed, you will not," said Nurse Blake, who had closely followed her young mistress. "Nobody touches my young lady's things while I am here to do it."

"Really you must humour old nurse," whispered Louise, "and get some rest yourself; you want it more than I do."

Constantia sent an evil look towards Nurse Blake, and swept gracefully away.

"Oh ye serpent, ye viper," muttered nurse as she followed her young lady into

her room. But Blake was by no means active as a tire-woman, and Louise soon sent her off to bed; and seating herself by the fire, for the evening was chilly, fell into a pleasant reverie upon the new and indefinite, but brightly-tinted future that imagination opened to her. Then suddenly she was disturbed by what felt like the touch of a cold finger on her neck. It was her amulet, which she must have pressed unconsciously. And then she remembered what her father had told her, half in jest it seemed, that this talisman would warn her of coming danger, if she paid heed to its indications. It was strange, too, how much importance her father attached to that precious amulet. She was to wear it night and day; on no account to remove it from her neck. The silken cord by which it hung covered a chain of steel, thin, but very strong. The amulet itself was of steel, damascened with gold, with an inscription in Arabic letters on the front of it. This little casket might not be opened. Her father had shown her the secret of it; but he had forbidden her to open it unless in dire distress, or in the event of certain knowledge of his death. As a check upon a natural feminine curiosity, he told her that, if once opened, no human power could close it again; and that she would incur by her thoughtlessness the anger of the guardians of the talisman, whoever they might be.

Louise did not take all this very seriously. So far the amulet had not exerted its powers in any way, unless it were in getting her into a small scrape with her lover, at the thought of which she smiled softly to herself. She was not ill pleased that he should be a little jealous.

The house was now perfectly still, and even the distant roar of London streets had ceased, while the church clocks all round—unheard and unthought of in the bustle of daily life—could now be heard, one taking the note from another as they tolled out the mystic hour of three.

How quickly the time had flown! Then, in the stillness of the night, she heard the handle of her door gently tried. The door was not locked, and it was opened softly. The hangings of the bed were between Louise and the door, and she could not see who entered. But some one had entered, had parted the bed curtains, and, finding the couch untenanted, was coming with quick, stealthy tread across the room. Louise caught a glimpse, in the pier glass, of a strained, white face, and of a hand that

bore aloft some glittering instrument. And then the spell that bound her to her chair was overcome by the force of her terror. She sprang to her feet and confronted Constantia.

There was no mistaking the momentary gleam of anger and disappointment in Constantia's eyes; but it was only momentary.

"You wicked girl," she cried, gally, "I knew you were asleep in your chair. Come, get to bed, or you will look like a ghost to-morrow, or, rather, to-day."

"But you look like one now," said Louise, shuddering. "Constantia, I thought you had come to murder me."

"What, with these nail scissors?" said Constantia, showing, for a moment, a pair of bright steel pliers. "A formidable weapon, is it not? But, dearest, what a curious thing that is about your neck. May I examine it?" stretching out her strong, white arms towards the amulet, which, just at that moment, seemed to Louise to give a throb in answer to the throbbing within her own bosom.

But just then Aunt Irene's bell rang. Nurse Blake and Luigi were stirring at once at the sound. Constantia glided off in the same direction, followed by Louise, who, throwing a wrap about her shoulders, hastened to see what was the matter.

Aunt Irene seemed to have suffered some kind of a seizure. She was slightly delirious, and did not recognise those about her, and she talked quickly and incoherently, while her mind seemed to be occupied with scenes long since past. It is terrible not to be recognised by those whom we love; to meet the vacant regards of eyes that are accustomed to rest upon us with affectionate glances.

Louise was full of grief and distress, but Constantia moved about with an easy, confident air.

"There is no danger," she said, calmly, "since I am here to look after her. I will give her some of her drops, and they will quiet her at once."

And, indeed, the medicine worked like a charm, and Aunt Irene fell into a profound and apparently dreamless slumber. And the house resumed its quietude.

"Ah, ye'll be dropping her off to sleep so as she'll never waken," muttered Nurse Blake, as she sought her couch once more.

In the morning Aunt Irene was still in a comatose kind of slumber, and continued in a drowsy, unconscious state. Her symptoms perplexed the doctor, who could

only recommend extreme care and quiet. Until some time after her brother's departure, the elder Miss Cornely had been the ruling spirit of the household, although always something of an invalid. But latterly she had become quite incapacitated, and the direction of affairs had insensibly passed into the hands of Constantia, who had been taken into the household since the departure of its head. The elder servants naturally grumbled at and rebelled against the new mistress, but Louise, who had no genius for housekeeping, gladly abandoned its cares to the wise, farseeing Constantia, who seemed to possess that anomalous gift of an old head on young and handsome shoulders. And Louise had only laughed at old nurse's warnings, ascribing them to a pardonable jealousy.

The experience of the night had for the moment inspired a certain mistrust, but in the cheerful morning light things took a very different aspect, and the midnight, or, rather, the three-o'clock-in-the-morning possible robber or assassin was resolved into a kind and watchful companion, flourishing a pair of scissors.

After the declaration of the night before it might be expected that Herbert Shepstone would be heard of in some way or other; and, in fact very soon there came a note from him, beginning, "Dearest Louise," and telling how he had been summoned, by telegraph, to rejoin his regiment; but that he would return as soon as he could get a few hours' leave. It happened, however, that Colonel Shepstone had written to his friend, the colonel of Herbert's regiment, asking him to keep the young man at work, "like the very deuce," and to stop all leave on any pretext whatever. A request which was so entirely consonant with the grim commander's notion of what was fit and right, that there was no chance for Herbert of showing his nose beyond the precincts of the camp for some time to come.

And Herbert's absence was hardly compensated by a visit from Bessie, who was in a very bad temper indeed, and scolded poor Louise into tears. It was so mean of her to make her pretence of friendship a cover for a flirtation with Herbert, who, for that matter, had nothing but his "highly lucrative profession" to look to, and could not possibly marry for another twenty years.

"Twenty years!" echoed Louise in dis-

may, "why, I shall be thirty-nine by then."

"Oh, he will never marry you, you goose," retorted Bessie, and whirled away in greater dudgeon than ever.

But there was more serious cause for dismay before long. It was close upon midnight, shortly after the Shepstones' ball, when there was a summons to the outer door, and Louise heard the voice of George Melitus, her father's secretary and assistant. "Papa has come back," cried Louise joyfully, as she darted into the hall. There was George, dusty, ragged, broken, with unkempt hair and bandaged arm; in his eyes a staring, wild look, and altogether a figure suggesting ruin and disaster. At the sight of Louise he flung himself on his knees before her, covering his face with his hands. Louise turned white, her knees shook under her; Nurse Blake ran to support her.

"Dearest mistress," cried George in a broken voice, "forgive me that I live to tell the tale. I would have died to save him."

"He is dead, then? My poor father," wailed Louise.

"Dead! dead! dead!" repeated George, in a tone of agony.

"And ye killed him, ye he-reptile," muttered nurse to herself, but loud enough to be overheard by Constantia, who was weeping silently and wringing her hands, but who, nevertheless, kept a keen eye and ear for what was passing.

Luigi, too, came forward, bewailing his master's fate; and in the midst of it all, thrusting back the portière of her bedroom, stood Aunt Irene, a tall, ghastly, white figure, who watched the scene with wild, unmeaning eyes.

George's story, when it could be told in a coherent manner, was plain and short. Everything had gone well with the expedition; the excavations had been most successful, numerous and valuable objects of art and archaeology had been recovered, including many in solid gold and silver. But the news of the treasure-trove had excited the cupidity of a tribe of Kurds, who had swooped down upon the camp, murdered Cornely, the leader of the expedition, pillaged and carried off every article of value, and left George among the rest for dead, over the body of his master, which he had valiantly defended. Then, after much suffering and privation, George had dragged himself home with the news.